USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

OPERATING IN HIGH THREAT ENVIRONMENTS

JUNE 2005

Cover:
Members of an all-women work crew survey progress on a rural road in Nepal's conflict-affected Western hills.

Photo Credit:
USAID/Khagendra Subba Jabegu

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FORWARD

Dear Colleague,

It is our pleasure to provide you with the report of the first joint U.S. Agency for International Development - State Department conference on managing assistance programs in high threat countries, held in Cairo in December 2004. Conference participants shared lessons learned and best practices from embassies across Asia, plus Haiti and Kosovo. We were also pleased to welcome a delegate from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development.

Our intent in publishing this report is twofold. First, to fulfill a promise to former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage that we would convene this important conference and distribute the lessons learned to all posts, so others can learn from our experience. Second, it is to encourage all of us to continue to experiment with new approaches and share new lessons learned with our colleagues around the world. There is little that is uniquely American about the lessons contained in this report, so we are making it available to all of our foreign assistance colleagues from other donor countries.

We welcome your comments by email to shgreen@usaid.gov. If there is sufficient interest in the issues and challenges raised in this report, we will consider convening another conference.

Yours truly,

Mark S. Ward
Deputy Assistant Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development

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Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since September 11, 2001, operating circumstances have become increasingly difficult for some U.S. missions. In these high-threat environments, U.S. government personnel face daily challenges implementing assistance programs with limited ability to visit project sites, publicize their activities, work closely with local beneficiaries or increase their staff for large assistance programs. As a result, the U.S. government and larger donor community have had to be innovative in monitoring and evaluation, public diplomacy, civil-military cooperation and program implementation.

This report summarizes the lessons the U.S. government has learned in carrying out programs in dangerous yet critical environments. Four themes emerged from a joint USAID-State Department conference on managing programs in these environments:

1) the central role of locally hired staff and local partners;
2) the importance of mission teamwork;
3) the need to balance security with the risks inherent in some programs; and
4) the importance of flexibility in program design, implementation, and evaluation.

USAID/WEST BANK/GAZA

A young boy in the West Bank and Gaza enjoys a burst of clean water from a USAID project.

LOCAL STAFF

Local staff play a key role in implementing programs in high-threat environments and keeping them going during uncertain times. Throughout the world, U.S. missions are confronted with the challenge of having large, demanding development programs in places where it is dangerous or unfeasible to have a large contingent of American staff. In these situations, highly qualified local staff fill the void, helping design, manage, and monitor programs. Local staff can play a similarly important role in the event of an evacuation of U.S. personnel. Appropriately trained local staff, with the necessary delegations of management responsibilities, can keep many vital activities going during periods of uncertainty.

Programs in high-threat environments should also rely more heavily on local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as they are more likely to stay active in a country during crises than international NGOs. Planning for contingencies in advance and delegating more authority to local staff and NGOs would allow the U.S. government to stay engaged in difficult areas and sustain its hard-won progress during evacuations.

TEAMWORK

Teamwork is critical in high-threat posts. At U.S. missions, the team is composed not only of State and USAID employees but also of local staff and often the military. In small posts with big programs, cooperation between agencies and teams is more common than at large posts. However, to achieve common objectives, all team members must work together and communicate.

While necessary in many high threat environments, collaboration between civilian agencies and the military can be difficult as each organization has its own 'culture' and language. Yet, cooperation and understanding could be facilitated if government agencies trained their personnel headed for overseas postings in the roles, methods of operation and jargon of the other relevant agencies. Government agencies could also try harder to learn from the best practices of other branches.

SECURITY

In high-threat environments, the need to keep mission personnel safe often clashes with the need to visit project sites, meet with beneficiaries of development assistance, consult with partners and conduct public diplomacy. These competing goals often lead to tension between security officers and mission personnel.

Understanding the pressures and responsibilities of security personnel can help overcome these tensions and encourage compromise. Security officers in missions are ultimately accountable for keeping U.S. personnel safe. This responsibility can make security officers reluctant to approve trips outside of secure areas, making it very difficult for U.S. employees to implement and monitor assistance programs. Communication is vital to overcome this impasse – mission personnel should educate security officers about their roles and communicate how development assistance and public diplomacy ultimately advance security and help win hearts and minds. Mission personnel could also ease the burden on security officers by using telecommuting or teleconferencing to reduce unnecessary trips and giving sufficient advance notice for trips to project sites. Finally, all mission personnel would benefit from more security training prior to arriving at a high-threat post.

FLEXIBILITY

Monitoring and evaluation is notoriously difficult in high-threat environments as security conditions often prevent mission personnel from visiting project sites and gathering data. Some missions have overcome this difficulty by relying more on local partners for information or by teaming up with the military, which often has greater access to remote and insecure locations. For example, in Afghanistan, stationing reconstruction teams made up of military and civilian personnel in provincial capitals has had the advantage of getting information back to Kabul, where mission staff members are sometimes desk-bound. State and USAID might also collaborate closely with other bilateral and multilateral donors less likely to be affected by deteriorating conditions.

The U.S. government could also limit the number of employees sent to difficult posts, by stationing program managers, contracting officers, legal staff and others in nearby safe havens and using technology to stay in touch with partners. Using nearby safe havens would also reduce the stress on families normally divided in unaccompanied posts. Easing some of the legal and procedural requirements in high-threat environments requires high-level action in Washington, D.C., but the benefits in terms of efficiency and efficacy of assistance programs would be well worth the effort.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN DIFFICULT ENVIRONMENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the best of circumstances, the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of U.S. programs overseas is a challenging process. Identifying appropriate indicators, finding ways to quantify successes and maintaining high standards among U.S. employees and contractors in carrying out the M&E process over the lifetime of an activity are all subject to pitfalls, challenges and dilemmas. Additionally, circumstances unforeseen at the time of the activity's design can derail the most carefully planned M&E program.

Over the years, USAID has evolved an approach to M&E that is essentially complementary, with USAID missions taking responsibility for designing and implementing M&E programs for their activities and the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) holding missions accountable. For most missions and most activities, this approach has worked well.

However, in an increasing number of countries where U.S. missions are present, operating circumstances have changed drastically – in the direction of greater difficulty. Now missions find themselves having to modify activities rapidly in response to sudden change and losing access to many places where these activities have taken place. Missions and the OIG need to work together to address these looming challenges before an audit takes place.

Since the events of September 11th, it seems that these difficult circumstances are becoming more commonplace. Thus we face the question: What can be done to promote effective monitoring and evaluation for U.S. programs in high threat environments?

DISCUSSION

The presence of high threat levels in a country receiving U.S. assistance does not cancel out the need for M&E. If anything, appropriate M&E is even more essential in such circumstances. Otherwise, there will be no way of determining whether U.S. efforts are having a positive effect in critical situations or whether U.S. human and material resources should be dedicated in dangerous conditions.

In an increasing number of countries where U.S. missions are present, operating circumstances have changed drastically – in the direction of greater difficulty.

What is true, though, is that M&E efforts appropriate to high threat environments require greater flexibility and imaginative

thinking in order to be effective. For example, what is to be done if, in the midst of an ongoing U.S. government program, the political situation deteriorates so drastically that personnel can no longer make site visits or can do so only at great costs on the security side (as has happened in the past four years in the West Bank and Gaza)? Or in a situation where U.S. government personnel may be relatively secure, but activity beneficiaries may be reluctant, for political or other reasons, to volunteer the data needed for M&E purposes? Or when the OIG arrives on the scene for a regularly scheduled audit after radically altered circumstances have negated the basis for key assumptions made during the activity design process and upon which the mission had pledged to carry out its M&E obligations?

If a mission or a technical officer operating in a high threat situation is concerned about being held to unrealistic standards in an eventual audit, risks will be avoided – and so will otherwise worthy activities.

Fortunately, movement toward greater flexibility in M&E did not have to await the myriad of re-evaluations following the September 11th events. By that time, OIG staff had already begun working more collaboratively with missions in the early stages of activities to find solutions to M&E problems before they arose. As there is greater emphasis today on the timeliness and reliability of data, when missions and OIG work together in determining the data needed for M&E, expectations are more likely to be grounded in reality. For example, some missions have begun doing concurrent audits/risk assessments with OIG as programs are being designed, rather than having an audit two or more years after the design phase. The U.S. mission in West Bank/Gaza did this and found it very helpful, as OIG was operating with the same information post had at the time (and not with the benefit of hindsight).

An additional point in favor of more advance collaboration arises in the case of high threat environments – which are almost inevitably areas where the risks attached to an activity are greater. Yet drastic needs often call for risky responses. If a mission or a technical officer operating in a high threat situation is concerned about being held to unrealistic standards in an eventual audit, risks will be avoided – and so will otherwise worthy activities.

For the foreseeable future, it seems likely that many of the places most important to U.S. foreign policy are also going to be the most dangerous. If U.S. government activities are to be effective tools in achieving U.S. foreign policy objectives, risks cannot be totally avoided. In fact, it is probable that more risks will need to be taken more often. The M&E process will be more efficient if missions and the OIG work in close collaboration.

Not all problems can be overcome, of course. High-risk posts are often short-staffed, and when this is true, M&E often falls victim to higher priority tasks. Locally hired staff and/or contractors may be able to fill in some of the gaps. As the participants discussed several times during the conference, the U.S. government does not operate in a vacuum with regard to retaining its staff. Its highly skilled employees often have more financially attractive options available to them. Thus, senior decision-makers need to re-examine the appropriateness of incentive packages (not just salaries) for U.S. and local mission staff in high-risk situations.

Security costs have become a major factor in the M&E process in many posts including Iraq, Afghanistan, West Bank/Gaza, Haiti and Sri Lanka. When U.S. mission employees, on the simplest site visit, must be accompanied by entire teams of expensive security personnel, chances are that over time fewer and fewer visits will be made.

Flexibility and imaginative approaches can help in this regard. For example, the West Bank/Gaza mission operates under some of the most difficult conditions imaginable. U.S. personnel cannot enter Gaza at all at present, and their visits to the West Bank require elaborate security preparations. To deal with this situation, the mission has devolved project management to the local level – to contractors and Palestinian employees, who have great difficulty in making visits to the mission's offices. Meetings with West Bank employees and partners can sometimes be arranged in Jerusalem, but increasingly, the mission has relied on teleconferencing.

Several of the mission's employees resident in the West Bank are also participating in a closely monitored experiment with 'telecommuting.' They work from their homes, which allows them to concentrate on activities close by (and thus requires less time spent at check-points, etc.), and are in daily contact with mission headquarters through its computer network. This approach seems to be working reasonably well and is allowing the mission's program to continue without diverting too much of the budget to security. However, West Bank/Gaza is a rather compact area with a fairly good communications infrastructure, and the same methods might not be adaptable to Afghanistan, for example.

USAID/SYLVANA ROA

USAID has constructed 600 kilometers of roads in the West Bank and Gaza that are used by more than 500,000 people each day. The roads provide a safer means of travel and speedier access to health services. The roads also enhance commerce by connecting villages to nearby towns, so farmers and manufacturers can get their goods to market.

Other missions, such as in Sri Lanka, rely on grantees and partner organizations to assist them in M&E in areas where mission staff may not go for security reasons. But, as safety is a primary concern, this option has limits since there may be areas that grantees do not feel safe in and will not go. In addition, this option may have limits in a society where people do not tend to volunteer information. The 'lessons learned' from these experiences emphasize that imagination, flexibility, and collaboration between U.S. government actors can overcome obstacles unique to each situation.

Another concern raised was the issue of M&E as it pertains to vetting of grantees and partners. Under the Foreign Terrorist Act, no indirect benefit may accrue to foreign terrorist organizations through U.S. government-funded programs. This can be very difficult to ensure. One post mentioned that if local groups were generally compromised, or if it was not possible to thoroughly vet grantees, one option would be to work mainly with UN organizations and with international NGOs. In the West Bank and Gaza, where this is a major issue, there is a rigorous risk audit regime in place. The audit regime includes voluntary vetting for grantees, anti-terror certification for all non-U.S. organizations (and for key individuals at the contract and subcontract level) that receive contracts for amounts over $100,000 and that have more than a one-year timeframe. These requirements will be extended

soon to government entities and educational institutions. This regime has been very effective. Thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations have been vetted. Since 2003, there have been Congressionally-mandated risk audits on contractors, grantees, and subgrantees, as well. To date, about 100 such audits have been conducted, at a cost of about $1 million per year. Although it is expensive, the mission feels the process is worth it because it helps to spot any potential problems and ensure that no benefit accrues to any foreign terrorist organizations. This strategy also helps the mission respond to Congressional inquiries.

CONCLUDING POINTS

Appropriate M&E methods are essential for U.S. government agencies' operations. The U.S. government is responsible to Congress and American taxpayers for the resources entrusted to it. Another level of responsibility is to clients and partners in the field. Finally, U.S. government employees have a professional duty to see that they are achieving the results they set out to achieve.

In the discussion of M&E, the key word that emerged was 'flexibility'. Missions know what this means – especially those operating in high threat areas – but those working in the field still need guidance. Greater collaboration with OIG colleagues can supply some of this guidance, and in recent years, OIG has shown that it too appreciates the need for flexibility.

Neither missions nor regional IG offices, however, operate in a vacuum. If flexibility is to be institutionalized – not just as an ad hoc arrangement a mission may adopt – this has to be done in Washington. Regulations have built up over decades – some imposed by Congress but many of our own making. It is not realistic to expect great changes overnight. But if State and USAID are serious about operating effectively as implementers of U.S. foreign policy in high-threat areas, Washington must give the field more flexibility.

USAID/PATRICIA ORLOVITZ

These children attend a school built in part by USAID in the village of Budrige e Poshtme/Donja Budriga in Kosovo. The school is one of many programs to increase cooperation and communications between different ethnic groups, communities and the local government.

Many practical suggestions were voiced. Most, like those drawn from West Bank/Gaza's experience, were applicable to a particular situation, further emphasizing the need for flexibility in approaching M&E. For example, in Afghanistan, stationing joint civil-military teams, known as Provincial Reconstruction Teams, in provincial capitals has had the advantage of getting information back to Kabul, where mission staff members are largely desk-bound. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army Corps of Engineers has been very helpful in carrying out M&E.

Missions can also build more flexibility into their programs by choosing contracts,

grants and cooperative agreements carefully. Cooperative agreements, for example, give implementers more flexibility regarding travel and meetings than contracts do. For contractors, the Chief of Mission could offer fewer restrictions and be sure that everyone involved knows what the rules are for the various types of personnel. Setting a fixed price for completion of a project instead of paying the contractor in installments based on labor, materials and incremental progress makes monitoring easier. However, these types of contracts have problems of their own.

The 'lessons learned' from these experiences emphasize that imagination, flexibility, and collaboration between U.S. government actors can overcome obstacles unique to each situation.

Overall, appropriate M&E is essential for U.S. government agencies to accomplish their assigned tasks. However, individual missions, working with their OIG colleagues, are in the best position to determine how to carry M&E out. It must be kept in mind that taking risks opens the door to possible failures. On the other hand, operating effectively in high-threat environments means taking risks.

Moderator:
David Pritchard, Regional Inspector General, USAID/Egypt

Panelists:
Larry Brady, Director, Office of Strategic Planning and Operations, USAID/Bureau for Asia and the Near East
Carol Becker, Mission Director, USAID/Sri Lanka
Margot Ellis, Mission Director, USAID/West Bank and Gaza

OPERATING IN A HIGH THREAT POST

ADDRESS BY AMBASSADOR NANCY J. POWELL, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Ambassador Powell emphasized the importance of teamwork in high threat posts. She noted that the "team" in every mission is composed not only of the Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission, USAID Mission Director, and all U.S. direct hire employees and contractors, but also of the Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs), Washington colleagues, and even the host government (especially on security matters). Everyone at a mission must make an effort to understand the others at the mission and the various issues they may have, as well as to respect each other at the individual and agency level.

FSNs, as important as they are in keeping programs going when U.S. staff have been ordered to leave and in carrying out activities in the field, are often under threat. While U.S. staff come and go, FSNs are there for the long haul. We need to make more of an effort to take their concerns into account. In many places, more can be done to help ensure the security of the FSNs. For example, all security drills should fully include them, and if an incident occurs that necessitates activating a phone tree, they should be included in any calls. If FSNs are harassed locally, steps should be taken to ensure their safety.

Ambassador Powell also praised Diplomatic Security for working to keep all mission team members safe under difficult conditions. She noted the importance of frequent drills on safety procedures and of knowing where all personnel are at any given time. She also noted the importance of periodic evaluations of a mission's "footprint" and of being innovative on security issues. The need for communication, especially on security issues, is vital. Ambassador Powell also mentioned the Accountability Review Board, which is always in the back of the Chief of Mission's and Regional Security Officer's (RSO) minds. If there is a security incident, especially one that involves death or injury, the Chief of Mission and RSO must attend an Accountability Review Board meeting in Washington. Thus, RSOs and Chiefs of Mission must consider proposed activities and programs in light of whether they can be justified as worth the risk. They must also consider whether all possible precautions have been taken and all possible contingencies mapped out for any given program or activity. Everyone needs to know where the "red lines" are, as individual acts can have consequences for the entire mission.

Ambassador Powell also noted that in high threat assignments, everyone needs some flexibility and a sense of humor. It is important for people to get out of the office; one practice of hers was to host regular barbeques, which went far in breaking the ice between colleagues. It is also important to work with junior officers, who may be adjusting to State or USAID and to a high threat environment, and to reward those who take on difficult assignments and do them well.

Finally, Ambassador Powell stressed the importance of taking the mission's annual performance plans seriously. These plans are not just documents required by Washington. Regular tracking during the year of how a mission is doing on meeting its goals can assist in making adjustments as needed and help form realistic expectations about what can be accomplished. She also urged missions to take the opportunity to educate Washington visitors about the realties on the ground and the issues their mission faces.

MANAGING PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN HIGH THREAT AREAS

INTRODUCTION

Public diplomacy takes many forms, but overall it involves communicating America's ideals, goals and programs to non-Americans. It is carried out by Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) and USAID's Development Outreach and Communications Officers as well as by various other Embassy sections. This may be done on a one-to-one basis, through services offered to the wider community or through media contacts.

Heightened security concerns in recent years have made many traditional types of outreach more difficult at a time when public diplomacy is even more important. Restricted access to American facilities cuts back on services once offered to the community. The new procedures for granting visas in the wake of September 11th have taken their toll on exchange programs. U.S. policies, which are controversial in many parts of the world, often impede our efforts to secure media coverage of our activities even when they are unrelated to those policies. These policies may even make many local citizens reluctant to participate in U.S.-related public diplomacy events or USAID programs. And, of course, security concerns often require a 'low profile' approach during events, programs or other situations, which, in happier times, would have been able to generate considerable good will for the United States.

USAID/INDONESIA

Food and other relief delivered to the thousands affected by the tsunami in Indonesia helped generate enormous goodwill for the United States. Branding of that assistance ensured communities knew the supplies were a gift of the American people. Before the tsunami, 72% of Indonesians opposed U.S. foreign policy on terrorism. Since the tsunami response, that percentage has dropped to 36%. (Terror Free Tomorrow Poll, 2005)

DISCUSSION

In this session, participants argued that programs – specific events, services and institutions – are most at risk due to events outside the control of public affairs. Security concerns, budget re-allocations and shifts in U.S. foreign policy can severely restrict or even eliminate once-flourishing and valuable programs, such as American Centers. These facts point to the essentially 'temporary' nature of programs,

and therefore, the need to switch the emphasis in public diplomacy from a program orientation to building firm and stable relationships and contacts, especially with the media.

Establishing and maintaining a broad range of contacts with the media is important. In some places, there is also a need to bolster professionalism in the local media. In all countries, journalists are in constant need of timely new materials written in the local language. This is something an effective and well-staffed public affairs office, working closely with USAID and the mission as a whole, can supply.

Local employees are highly-skilled and possess experience in high demand by the growing private industries in many of the countries in which USAID works. It is increasingly important that missions are able to offer competitive compensation packages to retain their most capable staff members.

The conference attendees expressed concern about how to implement USAID's new branding requirements and conduct public diplomacy when doing so raises security issues. No U.S. employee in the field wants to see projects, programs, or facilities financed by American taxpayers go unappreciated simply because local citizens are not informed of the provenance of an activity's resources. Still, there are situations when caution is necessary. In some cases, potential beneficiaries might be reluctant to use a facility or avail themselves of a program if by doing so they endanger themselves because of their association with the United States. For example, in some countries, prominent displays of USAID's brand on vehicles, clinics or schools could make them targets, threatening those who work in them or use their services.

Another issue raised in this session and other sessions was the need to take a more flexible approach in handling some of a mission's traditional activities. For example, at some posts, the longstanding and highly successful Fulbright program faces difficulties in bringing American academics into the country. If scholars were classified as contractors (in the USAID sense) rather than as grantees, the problem would be much more manageable.

Participants also stressed the key role that competent and dedicated local employees play in public affairs efforts. This issue was also discussed at other conference sessions. Especially in high-threat environments, local employees maintain the continuity of the mission's programs. However, many of them are highly-skilled and possess experience in high demand in the burgeoning private sectors of many of the countries in which we work. It is increasingly important that missions are able to offer competitive compensation packages in order to retain their most capable staff members.

One panel member recounted some of the public affairs experiences of the Egypt mission and pointed out the existence of a close relationship there between the PAO and USAID. USAID has been present in Egypt for almost 30 years, expending almost $26 billion in development resources. The Egypt program was USAID's largest before Iraq, so there is a long history, with many lessons learned, of dealing with the media. Both the Embassy and USAID have policies of granting frequent interviews to journalists and inviting them to events and site visits.

Last year, USAID/Egypt had two Egyptian summer interns, allowing the mission to conduct an in-depth study of the media coverage of its activities over the preceding year. Surprisingly, in a period marked by sharply growing anti-Americanism in Egypt, media stories were overwhelmingly positive. Of almost 500 stories analyzed, favorable ones outnumbered unfavorable ones by more than three to one. The mission concluded from this study that the outcome has to be attributed to many years spent cultivating media relationships by both the PAO and USAID.

While public diplomacy has been faced with numerous challenges in recent years and has had to adjust to decreasing resources, there has been a plethora of technological advances that allow for new approaches to old activities. For example, the internet allows U.S. facilities to offer their clients a degree of access to scholarly information undreamed of only a decade ago. Even in many high threat environments, communications advances have compressed a generation of gains into a few years. The blossoming of cell phone networks in many countries has turned the perennial problems associated with inadequate land-line telephone systems into ancient history. Fax machines and e-mail allow the easy dissemination of information and invitations to mission events, when only a few years ago, these tasks required teams of messengers braving traffic jams for hours to hand-deliver important materials. Despite these advances, however, there is still no replacement for one-on-one contact.

CONCLUDING POINTS

High threat environments make traditional public diplomacy more difficult and at the same time, more necessary. Continuity of effort in situations subject to rapid and unforeseeable change means that the emphasis should shift from programs to relationships. As in so many U.S. missions, those in high-risk countries depend on the retention of highly qualified local employees. Greater flexibility for a mission to offer its most valued staff members competitive compensation packages is essential, especially in countries where the private sector is growing rapidly. USAID is often the largest part of a U.S. mission in developing countries; thus, USAID and its activities must be closely integrated into public diplomacy efforts. As one conferee explained, it is not just the PAO staff that is responsible for furthering public diplomacy – it is every mission employee's charge. If U.S. taxpayers are to be asked to finance development efforts in the cause of promoting global security, then they have the same right to expect that their contributions will be appropriately presented to beneficiaries as they have to expect U.S. overseas activities will be satisfactorily monitored and evaluated and carried out with local security conditions in mind.

Moderator:
Larry Schwartz, Director, Office of Press and Public Diplomacy, Bureau of South Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Panelists:
James Bullock, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy, Egypt
Andrew Steinfeld, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy, Pakistan

MILITARY – CIVILIAN RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In many high threat environments, collaboration between the military and civilian agencies like State and USAID is a necessity. This is not an easy task for either side – each has its own 'culture', its own history, even, in many cases, its own language. Yet, over the last decade, each has learned from numerous experiences that much can be gained from cooperation and communication.

As with other topics considered during this conference, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model that can be applied to all cases. In the first place, the military presence differs from place to place. It may be overwhelming and dominating in what is clearly a war zone – as in Iraq. It may be small and confined to a small part of the country – Haiti is a case in point. It may be predominantly American (Iraq), multinational with American participation (Kosovo) or not American at all (as in several recent peacekeeping operations in Africa). The military presence may be encountered everywhere (Iraq) or confined only to specialized tasks (like clearing land-mines in southern Lebanon).

But in all situations, the challenge is much the same – how to get two very different types of organizations, each serving an important role in executing U.S. foreign policy, to work together.

DISCUSSION

This panel was comprised of individuals coming from distinctly different situations where civilian agencies and the military find themselves together. Not surprisingly, Iraq largely dominated the conversation.

The U.S. military in Iraq is primarily engaged in fighting an insurgency, and most units are involved to a degree with this effort. USAID's primary contact with the military is with specialized civil affairs units that are charged by their superiors with the task of securing tactical victories that lead to meeting strategic objectives. These units are made up mostly of reservists who come from a broad background of civilian professions, and many of these individuals have previous experience dealing with civilian agencies elsewhere in recent years. This does not by any means lead to instant and effective collaboration, but it helps.

The evolving relationship between USAID and the military in Iraq emphasizes the need for making and maintaining strong contacts, not only at the personal level, but also at the institutional level because civil affairs personnel are rotated from Iraqi assignments every four months. Because of this rotation policy, it may seem that by the time a military colleague learns a bit about how civilian agencies operate, he/she is replaced and the whole process has to begin again. Thus, the task of maintaining close relations is a continuous one.

There is, unfortunately, room for considerable misunderstanding on both sides. Military colleagues often have difficulty understanding the value of technical assistance and the concept of sustainable development. Civil affairs officers are generally tactically, rather than strategically, oriented. They often have difficulty comprehending what seems like State's and USAID's overly regulated way of operating. Unlike civilian agency officers, they have considerable discretion in dispensing financial resources (mostly for small projects, which are deemed tactically useful). For their part, USAID and State personnel can show a lack of understanding of the military culture that is so meaningful to military colleagues.

But there is also common ground. As indicated above, many civil affairs reservists have professional backgrounds not all that different from State and USAID personnel, and many of the latter have previously worked with or been part of the U.S. military.

USAID/NITIN MADHAV

In Afghanistan, like in many high threat environments, cooperation with the military for site visits, carrying out projects and ensuring general security is critical.

Common experiences forged mostly in the 1990s have also shown many people in the field that State, USAID and the military are in many ways complementary in situations like Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, the military can offer security-related services (visiting remote sites) for which USAID simply does not have the resources. Although most of the activities or projects of civil affairs units are tactically determined, they have strategic significance from a developmental point of view. Every repaired school, for example, furthers the goals of educational reform and literacy promotion.

On the other hand, military personnel in Iraq are becoming more appreciative of how an overall, coordinated and longer-term approach to economic development, job creation, infrastructure repair and expansion, and public health improvements can be an effective counter-insurgency tool. Additionally, USAID activities can offer many opportunities for public relations events that the military authorities see as useful in improving relations with the local population.

But each side must also recognize its own limitations. For State and USAID personnel, dealing with the military is in some ways like dealing with regional security office staff – both are specialists in assessing risk in high threat environments, and their concerns and guidance must be taken into consideration in planning activities and projects. The military needs to understand that sometimes USAID and its grantees have good reason to 'go low profile'. In Iraq, after a slightly rocky beginning, each side has learned more about the goals and operations of the other, and civil-military relations have improved.

One promising note mentioned in connection with both Iraq and Kosovo is that USAID has been able to participate actively in the training of Defense Department personnel being deployed to these areas. As the three major implementers of U.S. foreign policy in the field, State, USAID and Defense are increasingly being asked to cooperate closely in a growing number of high threat countries. If this goal is to be achieved, the training designed for personnel headed for field assignments must include discussion of how the 'others' operate, including their jargon. Like several other major concerns raised during the conference, this is clearly a matter for consideration and action in Washington.

While Iraq may have received a disproportionate amount of attention in this session, the discussion also touched on situations that are quite different. In Kosovo, for example, the military presence is multilateral, made up of personnel from five NATO countries, including the United States. Since the military presence is primarily aimed at peacekeeping between Serbs and Albanians, most of the military's dealings are with local governments, which are reasonably well developed. USAID's activities are also carried out at this level – with the result that the population sees the close links between the activities of the two entities.

In Afghanistan, USAID works closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a unique military unit with a long history of supervising development projects at home and abroad in the infrastructure sector. In Afghanistan, there has been more shared language and perhaps more shared strategic thinking in USAID-military relations. If something grabs the Corps' attention, they can move quickly and with considerable resources; cost seems not to be as much of a limitation as it is with USAID. In addition, the military planning cell at the Embassy has been very active in tracking progress on development programs and has made thoughtful suggestions on development projects and planning to State and USAID. In general, the military places emphasis on planning and thus can be a valuable ally on such development and reconstruction issues.

Afghanistan's experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) may offer unique lessons about civil-military cooperation for the future. PRTs, military outposts with embedded civil affairs, State, USAID and U.S. Department of Agriculture officers, administer quick impact project funds and accelerate reconstruction in these provinces, while enhancing security. USAID is now evaluating the PRTS to see whether they are a useful model for other countries. With that evaluation, USAID is exploring the balance between quick impact projects and long-term development.

The relationship between USAID and the military in Lebanon provides insights into how civil-military cooperation can help accomplish U.S. policy and development goals. In Lebanon, USAID works closely with the Department of Defense and Lebanese military in demining. Hundreds of thousands of mines still dot the Lebanese countryside – relics from French colonial days through the civil war and the Israeli occupation – with the southern part of Lebanon particularly affected. During the twenty years of Israeli presence, thousands of poor rural people fled southern Lebanon for the slums and refugee camps surrounding Beirut. Although the occupation ended several years ago, many of these internally displaced people have been reluctant to return to their home

villages, where their livelihoods in mined fields would be risky. Thus, thousands remain in temporary encampments near the capital, where poor conditions could lead to riots and instability.

In order to help the Lebanese government reconstruct their society, the Department of State, USAID, and the Department of Defense entered into a partnership to combine financial resources (from all three) and expertise (from the military) in an accelerated demining effort. The partnership has worked with local NGOs to further education about the dangers of mines and how to address this problem. Because this activity has also involved the Lebanese military, it has helped to heal the severely wounded relationship between many of Lebanon's most disadvantaged communities and the country's government. The U.S. government has also initiated activities to directly assist the thousands of mine victims and their families.

CONCLUDING POINTS

Throughout the conference, participants repeatedly emphasized the need for more and better teamwork among the U.S. agencies charged with the implementation of foreign policy. In the past, moves toward closer coordination have primarily focused on State and USAID (and in some cases, on other civilian agencies). With a growing number of high threat countries, it is essential that civilian agencies also learn how to work with the military.

The bottom line is that the two sides – civilian and military – have different perspectives, goals and meanings for the same words and concepts – but it is not acceptable for either side to continue to operate as though the other's concerns and activities are of little relevance. During the past decade, in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan, the sheer necessity of collaborating and communicating under difficult conditions in the field has brought military personnel and civilians together, if only on an ad hoc basis.

The building of effective and institutionally-based teamwork requires action at the highest levels of government. Government agencies should train their personnel headed for overseas postings in the functions, aims and methods of operating of the other relevant branches. Officers going out to the field should also be briefed on the other organizations' jargon, so U.S. personnel are speaking the same language in the field. Another example might be simply trying to learn from the best practices of other agencies. For example, USAID could look at the military's more flexible procedures for handling smaller projects in high threat situations. The Defense Department, for their part, could recognize that strategic considerations have an important economic dimension, as well as a military one, and incorporate this into planning for future operations.

Moderator:
Barry Primm, Deputy Mission Director, USAID/Afghanistan

Panelists:
Raouf Youssef, Mission Director, USAID/Lebanon
Elisabeth Millard, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy, Nepal
Robert Davidson, Director, Erbil Office, USAID/Iraq
Ken Yamashita, Mission Director, USAID/Kosovo

SMALL MISSION – BIG PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, U.S. missions are confronted with the challenge of having large, demanding development programs in places where it is dangerous or not feasible to have a large mission presence to manage and monitor these programs. In the past decade, a startling number of countries quickly moved to the forefront of U.S. concerns, many of which had no U.S. or USAID presence. In these places, it was deemed crucial that the U.S. government put programs and staff in place as soon as possible.

In other cases, small U.S. missions quickly found themselves with rapidly expanded resources as the emphasis moved from humanitarian assistance to multi-sectoral development activities. Then there are post-conflict situations – like Iraq and Afghanistan – where massive resources were appropriated by Congress while the U.S. mission was still in the formative stage. Finally, there are those missions hit by evacuations that are attempting to keep suitable programs alive.

In all these cases, the problem is basically the same – financial resources, and the consequent management responsibilities, are far out of proportion to the available U.S. and local staff. Sometimes the problem corrects itself within a couple of years, as staff recruitment catches up with program development. The post-Soviet European and Ethiopian missions come to mind. In other cases, difficult local conditions (such as high-threat environments and post restrictions on family presence) sharply hinder the staffing build-up. Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are examples. If a country is high on the U.S. foreign policy priority list, implementation and administration of an effective program cannot simply wait until recruitment problems are solved.

DISCUSSION

The panel members drew on their experiences from their past and present postings, from Pakistan and Yemen to Iraq and Jordan – all unique in their own way but all with programs regularly taxed at the limits of human resources.

One particular point was emphasized – the importance of building and holding on to a high-quality local staff. This subject was also discussed in other sessions, but in this session, several major problems connected with retaining local staff were aired. In short, the problem faced by many missions is the relatively poor quality of the incentive package that can be offered to local qualified professionals, who are often required to risk their own safety and are expected to take on extra tasks because of the mission's short-staffing problems.

Salaries and other compensation for local Foreign Service National (FSN) employees are tied to overall U.S. mission practices. USAID's FSN staff is highly professional, yet a larger percentage of

overall Embassy staff is clerical. As a result, USAID's FSN compensation packages can suffer by comparison with those offered by other employers (such as other development agencies). In many places, working for the U.S. embassy is no longer seen as a desirable job. Local staff, in addition to at times facing danger due to their connection to the U.S. government, may suffer socially. Compensation for local mission employees is often a surprisingly small part of overall expenditures, especially when the program is large. Given the difficulty and importance of keeping a competent staff, attempting to save money on salaries and compensation packages seems short-sighted. A representative from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID) who participated in the panel explained that the United Kingdom offers generous benefits to local staff in high-threat posts that the United States does not. Foreign service nationals employed by DfID receive danger pay, life and health insurance, childcare and accumulated time off. This generous compensation package helps DfID retain high-quality local staff even during difficult times. Once again, the conferees agreed that this is a problem that requires Washington's serious attention.

The unique situation faced by USAID in Iraq – not just a large program with a small staff but the largest effort in the Agency's history – has led to some imaginative approaches to the staffing problem. For a wide variety of reasons, it has been very difficult to fill vacant positions with either direct hire employees or Personal Services Contractors (PSC). At the same time, the Iraq mission has been under great pressure to take the lead in the post-Saddam economic recovery.

One solution USAID has tried has been to utilize contractors (for example, from International Resources Group) in a somewhat innovative way – by treating contractors as de facto U.S. government employees. This process has not been without difficulty. Problems have arisen with regard to the willingness of these personnel to accept certain responsibilities (in the absence of clearly defined guidelines). Problems have also surfaced regarding contractors' relationships with direct hire U.S. personnel, as well as with their familiarity with agency procedures and practices. There are also issues of oversight of large numbers of non-direct hire personnel. The direct hires must do a lot of training and be vigilant to ensure that the rules and regulations are followed and that the integrity of the program is maintained. Nonetheless, it has mostly proven to be a workable temporary solution to the staffing problem and may hold lessons for future efforts.

The Iraq USAID mission has also dealt with the staffing issue by recruiting highly-skilled third-country nationals (TCNs) from neighboring missions by offering them highly attractive salary packages. As an emergency measure, this has been useful, but in the long-term, taking a mission's best staff will cause hardships. If used on a regular basis, neighboring missions might

INTERNEWS

The small staff at the USAID mission in Pakistan is responsible for a large program that is critical to the U.S. national interest. This program to train an independent media is one part of USAID's efforts to promote democracy and stability in the country.

resent losing their best employees, even temporarily, to better paying missions, especially if hiring restrictions hinder them from being able to fill these vacancies on a temporary basis.

Washington could consider forming a surge capacity of TCNs who have language and professional skills appropriate for short-term relief in missions acutely short of U.S. personnel – but without penalizing the TCNs' home bases or these employees' standing with their primary mission. This concept has been used by USAID in responding to natural disasters. Why not try applying the idea to missions in major management crisis situations? Other imaginative ideas to keep high-threat positions filled included 'twinning' positions, with one person in Washington and the other in a critical post, sharing a job description and rotating locations. Another idea was rotating teams of experts in for tours of six months or less, with some overlap. Such high performance teams could theoretically perform at a high level quickly, and such a plan might attract more volunteers as well as avoid burnout.

In all small missions with big programs, the problem is basically the same - financial resources, and the consequent management responsibilities, are far out of proportion to the available U.S. and local staff.

One panel member commented that the State Department and USAID inadequately address the serious adjustment problems their personnel and their families often face after returning from a high-stress environment, especially at an 'unaccompanied' post. In the long-term, poor post-conflict adjustment could lead to decreased effectiveness of a competent employee or even to the loss of the employee. Once an employee and his/her family have a bad experience with such a posting, it becomes more likely that the employee will seek work opportunities outside the U.S. government. One suggestion for dealing with this problem was mandatory counseling for all personnel rotating out of such assignments (and making such counseling more than a 'check the box' exercise) on the assumptions that 1) most personnel could use counseling after such a difficult tour and 2) those who most need help would be more likely to get it if it was required and there was no stigma attached. Other suggestions included allowing home leave after one year assignments in high threat, unaccompanied posts to allow staff to reconnect with their loved ones (currently, this is allowed every two years) and allowing families of those assigned to unaccompanied posts to live in regional 'safe havens' to facilitate maintaining contact. Giving extra leave and allowing staff to accumulate leave above the standard ceiling, so they can take longer leaves when they need to, might also help attract staff to these posts.

The USAID programs in both Pakistan and Yemen have partially compensated for the staff shortage problem by working with, and making grants to, multilateral donor agencies that are better represented on the ground. This approach can make a great deal of sense for missions with small staffs, as it helps relieve the always-present resource management problem. Again, some actions on Washington's part are needed since neither the Embassy nor the USAID mission are autonomous in this regard. Participants also suggested that some kind of toolkit for modalities of making grants with bilateral donors would be useful. In Pakistan, it took a lot of time and effort to work out an understanding with DfID to strengthen the health care system. In this unique partnership, USAID worked on local health care services while DfID assisted the national health ministry. When this approach was tried in another country, it would not work. Posts could save a great deal

of effort if a toolkit were available containing approaches that might work in various countries. One participant from USAID/Nepal mentioned that Nepal was working on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DfID. Once it was done, perhaps the MOU could serve as a model for an overarching MOU that could be used in other countries. A similar toolkit for models and mechanisms to implement programs would be helpful for limited footprint/high threat missions to draw on, given their limited resources.

While Yemen has been on the front burner since the U.S.S. Cole incident, there is still no full-fledged USAID mission in Sana'a. Yet a sizable assistance program covering much of this very poor country has been initiated through a unique State/USAID cooperative effort. Although it seems that USAID's presence in Yemen will eventually grow, institutionally and with regard to staffing; lessons can be learned from this approach in which a small mission working closely with the State Department can manage a large program.

When the overall size of a U.S. mission is small, State and USAID personnel tend to work together more naturally to the advantage of both. One USAID attendee pointed out that during an African posting, he spent a quarter of his time serving as the embassy's economist. In return, embassy staff helped him gain valuable entrée into government ministries and private sector circles that positively impacted his performance of USAID assignments. Perhaps larger missions could learn from these experiences. Once again, flexibility in the field can carry the day.

In all of these examples, program management is the basic problem facing U.S. government staff. A large program with relatively few activities can be easier to manage then a much smaller one with many separate units. Similarly, contracts are more work than grants. Also the degree of M&E required has a big impact on what the U.S. and local staff must do.

This issue, like the others considered at the conference, requires action at the Washington level. Requirements imposed by Washington on small missions are often a much larger portion of the demands on their workload than the same requirements are for larger missions. Flexibility could help alleviate the pressures on small missions with big programs by allowing a mission to determine its optimal mix of grants and contracts, for example.

The issue of combining State and USAID support services at high threat posts was brought up as a way to consolidate workload and staffing needs on the management and administrative side. Some voiced concerned over this idea, however, as some participants noted the tendency of the agency in charge of a given service to favor its own staff needs. In the same vein, a State program, Model for Overseas Management Support, was mentioned. This program aims to carry out certain necessary, routine administrative activities before personnel leave for a high-threat post so these activities do not have to be done after arrival at the mission, thus decreasing the administrative workload for affected posts.

The representative from DfID provided a refreshing perspective on how regulations could be more flexible to address instead of add to the challenges faced by small missions with big programs. Participants agreed that it is often easier for colleagues in other development agencies to identify weaknesses in the way their counterparts do business and to suggest easier ways to solve some

of the problems we face (and we in turn to them). Therefore, everyone benefits by having candid conversations on the challenges and issues development programs face, especially in high-threat environments.

CONCLUDING POINTS

The most important argument emerging from the discussion was the importance of having highly qualified and appropriately compensated local staff in small missions with big and strategically important programs. If the full potential of local staff in high-threat environments is to be realized, the State Department and USAID must look at not just salary questions but also the entire compensation package. USAID should also look at the regulations defining the duties of direct hires, PSCs, and local staff.

In this session, the importance of promoting teamwork between State and USAID was again stressed. It seems that in small posts with big programs (like Yemen) cooperation is almost natural. Similarly, cooperation seems to increase when a mission suffers from a serious external threat that leads to evacuations (like in Pakistan). But in big posts – big Embassy, big USAID mission, big program – something critical is missing from the picture. Clearly, close cooperation can help achieve U.S. goals in almost any situation, but it is up to the U. S. government personnel on the scene to make this happen.

Finally, as we face increasing numbers of high-threat situations and the continuous problem of missions where program size races ahead of staffing capabilities, Washington has to seriously consider whether too much of a mission's time is being used to satisfy Washington's demands. Some of this demand comes from Congress, and perhaps not much can be done about it, at least in the short-term. But State's and USAID's senior staff can re-examine the pressures they place on all missions, especially those that are both under-staffed and in high-threat environments.

If frequent reporting requirements continue to have high priority, small missions could possibly call on regionally-based experts for short TDYs to carry out these tasks. Perhaps there are alternative solutions, but these cannot be solved from the field. Many of the conference attendees consistently raised the same basic concern – in many parts of the world, we need new solutions to old problems.

Moderator:
Barry Kavanagh, British Department for International Development

Panelists:
Lisa Chiles, Mission Director, USAID/Pakistan
John Groarke, Deputy Mission Director, USAID/Iraq
Doug Heisler, Mission Director, USAID/Yemen

DIPLOMATIC SECURITY

ADDRESS BY JOE MORTON, PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR DIPLOMATIC SECURITY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS) Morton started by saying that Diplomatic Security (DS) agents today are different from those in the past. Many DS agents now have criminal experience rather than just experience in doing background checks. On the whole, current DS agents are younger, since there have been a lot of retirements among senior DS officers in the last few years, and there are not enough senior agents to fill posts overseas and domestically. He also noted that the job today is very different than it was in the past; a new kind of agent is increasingly needed. A sign of this is that DS currently has five agents in language training, something very uncommon for DS agents in the past. As threats worldwide have expanded, DS agents require more expertise in a broad range of areas to combat them, leading to a need for more experienced and polished agents. However, the need for the more traditional agent carrying out protection duties remains. Due to an insufficient number of DS agents, though, this protection function is more and more often being carried out by contractors. DS cannot do all it is tasked to do without contractors.

PDAS Morton also mentioned that another thing to keep in mind as personnel work with RSOs and other DS personnel overseas is accountability. The RSO, along with the ambassador, are called to account at an accountability review board for every security incident; this is the sword that continually hangs over their heads. He mentioned that four accountability review boards had convened in the last month, mainly due to incidents in Baghdad. Given the situation in Baghdad and some other places where we now have missions, it is inevitable that there will be casualties. All DS can do is try to ensure that the ambassador's or RSO's actions and decisions were appropriate for a given situation. In order to help decrease the number of security incidents in Baghdad, DS currently requires all personnel posted there to undergo security training before arrival. DS may expand this requirement to all members of the foreign affairs community.

Questions were asked about whether the contractors working for DS are sufficiently supervised by DS managers and receive adequate training. There have been occasions when DS contractors have been so concerned about security and protecting their charges that they have forgotten the impact their weapons and actions can have on relationships with local communities and the image of the United States. PDAS Morton responded that contractors do receive training. However, training is expensive, and DS, like all bureaus, is operating with a tight budget. DS is also responsible for training the guard forces, which strains its budget even further. DS realizes this is a problem and is working on it.

Responding to a question about residential security for U. S. government personnel overseas, PDAS Morton noted that many residences currently in use were put into service under previous standards that were geared toward crime, not terrorism. This problem needs work, and DS is aware of the concerns. He noted that historically, after an incident, funds for this kind of security

are increased, followed by several years of stagnant or decreased funding, and we are paying for this pattern now.

Questions also arose about the issue of embassies becoming fortified and the trend toward co-location of all U. S. government agencies on one compound, versus the need for outreach to host populations. Participants wanted to know whether DS is rethinking the security posture to deal with the new reality post 9/11. PDAS Morton responded that the issue of security versus outreach involves difficult risk management decisions and requires innovative solutions. Both 'hard' and 'soft' targets worldwide are now under threat, and specific attacks are harder to predict than in the past.

The issue of danger pay was also discussed. PDAS Morton explained that it is regional bureaus that decide this issue after a request by a management officer, not DS. But RSO input is a factor in the decision.

PDAS Morton concluded by saying that communication among all personnel at a mission is crucial. It is important for everyone to have an understanding of what others do and the obstacles they face; DS personnel, for example, could often use a little education about what USAID does. He noted the importance of social interactions among U. S. government personnel at post outside of office hours (perhaps at dinners or other occasions) as a way of strengthening communication. The more we understand each other, he said, the better able we will be to help each other carry out our jobs and work as a team.

BOMB-PROOFING YOUR PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The question under consideration during this session was, "What do U.S. government agencies do to 'bomb-proof' their programs, i.e. prepare for a significant and unplanned interruption of either their programs or of a major part of their programs?" In extreme cases, the disruption might be due to the destruction of a 'home office.' More likely, the problems would arise from a deterioration of overall country conditions necessitating the evacuation of U.S. government staff. Less drastically, the same sort of situation would involve only a part of the host country where significant U.S. government programs are active.

It may be that in particularly volatile parts of the world the need to 'bomb-proof' a program is not based primarily on local conditions. On several occasions in the past 20 years, missions in the Middle East and Asia have been faced with ordered evacuations based on events elsewhere in the region. An example of this sort of 'overflow effect' hit the USAID/Egypt Mission following the bombings of the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. USAID/Egypt, then overseeing the Agency's biggest annual program, had only a few hours to abandon its premises (deemed highly insecure by Washington authorities), along with all their communications facilities, project files, and the ordinary supporting mechanisms for day-to-day business. No evacuation was ever ordered, but it took several months of effort to restore business-as-usual.

The purpose, then, of this session was to identify what agencies have learned from a wide variety of challenges that they have faced in recent years. Each situation has its distinct causes, but in most cases, the consequences of serious disruptions to 'normal' activities were similar.

DISCUSSION

Those in the field know that launching a program takes a long time and a lot of effort – from the first brainstorming sessions to having a contract team in place and operating. But shutting down a program, in extreme cases, can happen in 24 hours. Washington says "evacuate," and program officers, activity managers, and contractor staff are all out on emergency flights. Often the crisis passes fairly quickly, and it is possible for U.S. staff to return. Meanwhile, during the evacuation programs may have fallen off track, with contract personnel moving on to other assignments, and months or even years of effort are lost.

It is not possible to plan in advance and in detail for all eventualities that may lead to an interruption of program activities. But where U.S. agencies operate in high-threat areas, it should be possible for contingency planning, in a broad sense, to allow for the what ifs?

The assembled panel brought geographically varied experience to the discussion – from Jordan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Nevertheless, one common point quickly surfaced in the discussion – a point that was emphasized in other sessions. Simply put, the continuity of U.S. government programs everywhere depends on locally hired staff, who often have been with the mission a couple of decades and who have seen generations of U.S. employees come and go. In numerous situations, it is local staff who have kept programs going during prolonged 'winding-down' or 'phasing-out' when U.S. personnel were no longer available. In the opposite situation, as discussed in the "Big Program, Small Staff" session, it was mentioned that in rapidly expanding programs (often in strategically important, high-threat areas), local staff ensure the program moves ahead when assignment of U.S. personnel lags. Since local staff have shown they can effectively handle disproportionate roles in these situations, why not in situations like evacuations as long as their security is not at risk?

Advance planning is needed to keep programs going in the event of even short-term evacuation of personnel. It involves building into the design of a program exactly what can continue in the absence of some or all expatriates for various lengths of time and how the program or some components of it will continue under such scenarios. Such planning presupposes a clearly communicated master plan for the mission as a whole regarding what will occur during various types of drawdowns (such as who will stay and who will go, etc.). The motivation for doing this up front is clear – the U.S. government usually wants to stay engaged in difficult areas and to protect its hard-won gains over the long-term.

Simply put, the continuity of U.S. government programs everywhere depends on locally hired staff, who often have been with the mission a couple of decades and have seen generations of U.S. employees come and go.

Participants in this session suggested various imaginative ways to bomb-proof a program. Unsurprisingly, most were tied to specific situations or problems – again, no one-size-fits-all solutions. The key concept here, as in other panel discussions, was greater flexibility – more autonomy to individual missions to adopt approaches that work best for them.

For example, State and USAID could adopt the policy of delegating more internal management responsibilities to local employees. Institutional contractors could be required to designate a locally hired Deputy Chief of Party, with full authority to carry on in the absence of expatriate supervision. Evaluation criteria for agreements and proposals could even be written in a way that favors firms that propose locals for their key personnel. If expatriate staff (from State and USAID, including contractors) are evacuated to nearby safe-havens, it may be possible for them to make short visits to maintain contacts. There is also the teleconferencing approach that is proving useful to the West Bank/Gaza Mission. All of these possibilities can give State and USAID extra time to decide on the next steps and avoid having to shut down operations abruptly when a crisis might not be long-lasting.

In dealing with NGOs, more reliance could be put on local, as opposed to international, organizations. This may require changes in our funding and monitoring procedures. U. S. government agencies could also collaborate more with bilateral and multilateral donors that do not

USAID/BEN BARBER

The administrator of 11 health clinics in Basrah says, "the building was looted – computers and even the doors taken. USAID hired Iraqi contractors to fix everything and provide water pipes, electricity, furniture, computers, a refrigerator – everything."

necessarily labor under the burden of anti-American or anti-foreign feeling. Using grants and cooperative agreements instead of contract instruments for projects offers more flexibility regarding in-country presence and travel, but this comes at the cost of some of their control over their partners' activities.

However, an activity is begun and funded, careful advance planning could allow flexibility with regard to where the activity takes place. This would allow some shifting in case of flare-ups confined to one part of the country. Lowering the U.S. government programs' profiles in this way may be enough to keep things going during rough spots.

When all is said and done, however, it must be recognized that it is not possible to bomb-proof some activities. For example, highly-specialized technical assistance programs dependent on the presence of highly-specialized expatriates face near-certain suspension in the event of an evacuation, and it is unlikely they can be kept going through remote contacts. High-profile political projects, such as those connected to parliamentary and judicial institutions, are particularly susceptible to discontinuation in the event of major disruptions. Also, there might be problems continuing major construction activities, although perhaps with appropriate technical safeguards, these can be resumed later with limited losses.

One more topic received considerable attention in the discussion – expatriate staff matters. The argument was made that, when U.S. government agencies anticipate operating in a high-threat environment, the mission needs to recruit officers who have either worked under similar conditions or, if new to the U.S. government, have received appropriate training. New staff must closely heed the advice of the RSO and work with the RSO in carrying out their assignments. Missions must also do whatever they can to make sure their personnel, when stationed or traveling in potentially insecure areas, have good communications at all times with the home office. This may be costly, but it is necessary.

Related to this U.S. personnel consideration is how the broader mission accommodates families. Missions find themselves in an increasing number of places restricting the presence of dependents and in places where families are allowed but the living conditions are marginal. Perhaps every overseas career U.S. employee with a family has his or her own horror story of an assignment to a mission where family presence seemed to be viewed, at best, as an inconvenience. When tensions arise at a post, families are affected – fears of evacuation (or worse) may be present. In all these cases, missions must be prepared to communicate openly, not just with staff, but also with families. Evacuation may prove necessary, but again, nearby safe-havens may be a far better solution than returning to the United States.

USAID/PHILIPPINES

A former combatant in conflict-ridden Mindanao in the southern Philippines fertilizes his corn. He is one of 24,000 former combatants USAID has helped reintegrate into communities.

CONCLUDING POINTS

The participants in this session agreed that State and USAID are risking the loss of millions of dollars in resources and countless hours of staff effort if they do not plan appropriately for bomb-proofing their country programs. Not all eventualities can be accounted for, but experience in the field has shown that many things can be done to salvage and protect activities when local events become unfavorable.

In the event of a partial or even complete evacuation of U.S. personnel, an appropriately trained local staff, with the necessary delegations of management responsibilities, can keep many vital activities going for some time. Success in this regard is even more likely if U.S. evacuees make some use of the recent advances in remote communication to stay in touch with their in-country colleagues. In this situation, the importance of highly competent locally hired staff was recognized (and implicitly, also the need to make sure that missions are able to retain these staff members).

With regard to implementers, there were also many suggestions for avoiding disruptions – ranging from contractors designating locally-hired deputy chiefs of party to greater use of local NGOs and grants and cooperative agreements. In some situations, State and USAID might collaborate closely with other bilateral and multilateral donors less likely to be affected by deteriorating conditions. In most cases State and USAID would have to surrender a degree of control to keep a program going during evacuations or draw-downs, and obviously this is a decision that needs high-level support.

U.S. personnel questions, both with regard to staff and their families, received considerable attention – with emphasis on the need for staff to be prepared from the beginning to work in difficult situations and to follow security guidelines. For their part, missions need to communicate regularly and openly with families posted in high-threat environments.

Moderator:
Mark Ward, Deputy Assistant Administrator, USAID/Bureau for Asia and the Near East

Panelists:
Justin Sherman, Office of Transition Initiatives Manager, USAID/Sri Lanka
David Barth, Regional Economic Advisor, USAID/Jordan
Donald Clark, Mission Director, USAID/Nepal

ADDRESSING THREATS – AVOIDING RISK

INTRODUCTION

Working in areas when there is high risk to personnel is nothing new for State and USAID. What is different now, and what seems likely to remain so for years to come, is the pervasiveness of high threat situations. In U.S. missions from Haiti to Iraq to Indonesia, overseas personnel now face at least low-level threat on a daily basis. USAID particularly encounters these difficulties because its activities are often spread across wide areas that are far from capital cities. Unfortunately, the cost of providing adequate security to USAID personnel and contractors eats into the scarce resources that are available for development activities.

With these new challenges facing so many missions, regional security officers (RSOs) in numerous locations have had to devise new procedures in order to allow daily work to proceed. It has become more important than ever that the RSO be an integral part of the country team and that mission personnel seek the input of the RSO in planning and implementing activities. In fact, in her remarks about country team composition, Ambassador Powell placed RSOs in second place in importance only after senior mission leadership.

DISCUSSION

One member of the panel set the tone at the very beginning of the discussion by stating that, as a senior embassy official, the last thing he wants to see in an RSO is hesitation to contradict or speak frankly with senior staff regarding security issues. In the event of casualties or damage at a post, it is the ambassador and the RSO who are ultimately responsible and must answer to official inquiries into the incident. Because of his/her unique responsibilities, the RSO must be willing to stand up to higher embassy authorities and insist on security procedures based on the security office's assessments of the situation. He pointed out that this is not always an easy thing for an RSO to do, as ambassadors, deputy chiefs of mission, and USAID directors can be intimidating for someone with less service time overseas and a lower U. S. government rank.

This being said, while the safest situation might involve U.S. personnel always staying inside highly-fortified mission locations, both State and USAID employees' jobs usually require them to get out into the countries in which they are posted. Most of them also realize that in the performance of their duties there may be an element of risk.

It is not the RSO's job to evaluate whether an activity is 'essential' but to accurately describe the risks attached to carrying it out. By working together with the RSO, risk can be managed and, hopefully, minimized. The key to operating effectively in high threat areas is good, open and timely communication within the mission. Committees responsible for emergency procedures must be as inclusive as possible and must be a vital part of the decision making process in weighing risk against the performance of mission activities.

In risk management, both State and USAID could learn from the experiences of the U.S. military. The military has developed doctrines and procedures for dealing with serious risk. Until recently, U.S. overseas civilian operations have mostly dealt with these issues on an ad hoc basis, if at all. To correct this problem, guidelines must be worked out, which requires the attention of and input from Washington. Yet, the autonomy of missions must be respected. After all, being on the ground means having access to the best and most timely information available for making decisions.

In high risk situations, it is particularly important that artificial distinctions within a mission – that is, State versus USAID (or other U. S. government entities) – be minimized. After all, every U.S. and local employee works for the embassy. Especially in the face of external threats, teamwork and close cooperation at all levels are vital. In her remarks, Ambassador Powell argued that we have no choice, when faced by high-threat situations, but to cooperate and coordinate within a mission. She added that the composition of the country team should include all mission employees and associates – expatriate, locally-hired, contractors, and affiliated NGOs – that are vital to a mission's success.

In this session, participants again raised the need for training for new employees of State and USAID on the function, culture, jargon, and operating procedures of the other U.S. agencies active in the field. Over time, this training could help reduce the common complaint voiced in many missions today – that "the other just doesn't understand us." There is little hope for making intra-mission teamwork a meaningful concept if the team members do not even have a rudimentary understanding of the duties and culture of the others.

Another important point raised in this discussion that had also surfaced elsewhere in the conference was the need for greater flexibility in handling family situations in the event of evacuations or for posts classified as 'unaccompanied'. For example, Indonesia has experienced two evacuations in less than three years. Families were sent to nearby safe-havens (in this case, Singapore) temporarily, instead of back to the United States. This approach, which could be replicated elsewhere, reduces the pressures resulting from family separations and allows mission employees to stay close to their families. Again, attendees recognized that solving this complicated problem requires action back in Washington.

There is a need for greater flexibility in handling family situations in the event of evacuations or for posts that are classified as 'unaccompanied.'

One of the conference attendees pointed out that because he was based in Cairo, he and his foreign service spouse posted in Iraq for more than a year had enjoyed several brief reunions when she had leave. On the other hand, he knows of families back in the United States with a State or USAID employee in Baghdad or Kabul that have not been able to get together in nearly a year. Perhaps if safe havens were available (say, in Cairo, Amman or New Delhi), at least some families could mitigate the pains of separation, to say nothing of the worries that go with having a loved one in a dangerous post.

Again, such an approach would require flexibility. Under current conditions, nearby 'safe havens' are not generally available. Posts offering such services would have to be compensated for the

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Despite almost constant security risks, USAID has completed the 389-kilometer stretch of the highway connecting two of Afghanistan's major cities, Kabul and Kandahar. It is part of a larger, multi-national effort to reconstruct the entire ring road that links all four of the country's most important cities. The road enables farmers and other business people to get to markets, children to school and families to health clinics.

considerable expenses involved. In some cases, Memoranda of Understanding with host countries might need re-negotiation to allow for the residence of separated families and for the definition of their status during temporary residence.

Additionally, both State and USAID (and Congress) would have to figure out how to finance the greater expense of maintaining a family overseas, as opposed to in the United States. It seems likely that more and more of our personnel are going to be assigned for significant portions of their careers to 'unaccompanied' posts or to posts likely to experience forced evacuations. The relevant question then is would we rather risk losing the services of experienced mid-career professionals to family pressures caused by separation or expend more money to help families stay closer together and keep employees in their jobs?

Discussion then turned to some real-life examples from Jordan, West Bank/Gaza and Pakistan. Jordan experienced an assassination of a USAID employee in recent months. A colleague was watched for several days by his assassins, but he apparently did not notice. It is common for employees in posts where the average threat level is low to neglect simple daily precautions that RSOs try to drill into mission personnel. Although RSOs consistently advise Americans to vary travel times and routes, few people faithfully practice these guidelines, putting themselves in danger.

The West Bank/Gaza Mission faces its own unique security challenges. The RSO staff covering the West Bank/Gaza is split between the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Consulate-General in Jerusalem. The security staff is fairly large, including local personnel, and is supplemented by a contractor (Dyncorps). Even so, it is often stretched to its limits. Travel by U.S. personnel to Gaza is currently unauthorized, and some trips to the West Bank (for example, by visiting VIPs or high-level Embassy officials) can require the presence of all the available RSO staff plus the contractors.

How are scarce resources managed in the face of such demands? As was mentioned elsewhere in this report, innovative substitutes for face-to-face meetings are employed by personnel assigned to this post. Frequent use of teleconferencing and experiments with telecommuting for local employees reduce the need for U.S. official travel in the West Bank and Gaza. USAID has also devolved more activity management responsibilities to contractors (mostly local NGOs). While these measures may not be ideal (for example, it does complicate the M&E process) or adaptable to other high-threat areas, they have served the dual purpose of keeping vital programs going during the Second Intifada and conserving RSO resources.

For RSOs, the demands of providing security to high-level VIPs generally must take priority, so advance planning for the travel of personnel at post is essential. Because routes and destinations must be checked ahead of time and travel is frequently delayed at Israeli check points, even a short meeting or site visit close to Jerusalem, can involve half a day or more of travel and commitment of RSO staff. Additionally, several U.S. branches have frequent requirements to travel outside safe capitals. The uniqueness of the Israeli-Palestinian situation requires the personnel of many other mission offices and affiliates to travel into the West Bank.

Several other missions in high-threat environments face the same challenge, with high-level delegations constantly visiting the country. When there are many VIPs visiting at a given time, RSO resources are pushed to or beyond their limit, and the ability of the mission to carry out its regular tasks is put at risk. Addressing this problem requires some re-thinking about priorities in Washington. If security operations are given only enough resources to conduct a mission's ordinary activities – and these resources are regularly diverted to other uses – the lives of American overseas personnel and the success of American activities are put at serious risk.

Lessons from Pakistan provide some clues about how to conduct a mission's regular business with limited security staff. The situation in Pakistan is similar to that in Jordan and West Bank/Gaza, with limited RSO staff being able to arrange and accompany personnel on trips into the field. A participant mentioned that in Pakistan giving the RSO a lot of advance notice and a chance to pre-screen alternative sites for events and visits increased the likelihood of getting his/her approval.

CONCLUDING POINTS

A number of important points emerged from this discussion. First, it is important that the RSO stands up to his/her superior mission officers when the security of mission staff is at risk. Second, in high-risk situations, teamwork is essential. All U.S. personnel work for the embassy, and all have to be heard in mission-wide security discussions. Third, as a corollary to the above, communication on security matters among all mission employees is essential. The Emergency Action Committee, with active RSO involvement, is an excellent venue for such communication. Fourth, greater operational flexibility is a matter for serious consideration. If State and USAID professionals are going to increasingly face assignments in family-restricted posts, Washington should examine the various possibilities for easing the burdens of prolonged separation. Fifth, most State and USAID employees know that carrying out their duties may involve some personal risk – they need to work with the RSO staff to manage this risk. Finally, security requirements in many high-risk posts go well beyond providing the necessary, ordinary working support to field personnel. If additional high-priority demands are placed on RSO staff, additional resources must be supplied.

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